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SUBJECT: TALABANI DISCUSSES RUSSIA, IRAN, SYRIA, AND IRAQI
POLITICS WITH A/S WELCH AT UNGA

Classified By: NEA A/S C. David Welch, reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (U) September 14, 6:00 P.M., New York, UNGA

[1](#)2. (U) Participants:

USG

NEA A/S C. David Welch
NEA PDAS Elizabeth L. Cheney
Prem Kumar (NEA/I/POL notetaker)

Iraq

President Jalal Talabani
Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari
President's Chief of Staff Kameron Karadaghi
U.S. PUK Representative Qubad Talabani

[1](#)3. (S) SUMMARY. Reviewing their UNGA consultations with NEA A/S Welch September 14, Iraqi President Talabani and Foreign Minister Zebari said Russian President Putin had pledged to cooperate to renew the MNF-I mandate as the expiration of UNSC resolution 1546 approaches. They praised the USG's tough public line on Syria and pledged to deliver strong messages to Damascus and other Arab capitals that Syria must increase its support for Iraq. Talabani predicted Iran would continue to make life difficult for the USG and Iraq by continuing its nuclear program while holding out the possibility of undermining stability in Iraq. On Iraq's political process, Talabani suggested that the Kurds could work with moderate Arabs to defeat Islamist parties in the December election, but appealed for direct USG financial support to do so. He pledged the Kurds would continue to work to bring Sunni Arabs into the political process, and predicted that despite reports to the contrary, neither Prime Minister Ja'afari nor former PM Allawi would oppose the draft constitution. END SUMMARY.

RUSSIA

[1](#)4. (S) Reviewing his meeting with Russian President Putin at the UNGA, Talabani said he appealed for Russia to fully support the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG) and ensure that Russian media did so as well (instead of praising insurgents as "revolutionaries," for example.) Talabani claimed that Putin "agreed to everything" the Iraqis asked. He said Putin pledged that Russia would cooperate in the Security Council to renew the mandate of the Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I) as the end of the political process set out in of UNSC resolution 1546 approached. Talabani also said Putin agreed to consult with and respect the wishes of the ITG on ideas such as an international conference to promote national reconciliation in Iraq. On Syria, Talabani

said he ignored Putin,s offer to mediate between the Syrian Government (SARG) and the ITG and that he reminded the Russian President that Syria was the main source of terrorists operating inside Iraq.

SYRIA

15. (S) Talabani and Zebari both praised Amb. Khalilzad,s recent public remarks about Syria and noted that those points had been delivered at just the right time. Talabani charged that the SARG was "deliberately supporting" former Ba'athists in Iraq and was allowing the Iraqi Ba,ath Party Central Command to operate training camps across Syria. He noted that the SARG had so much control over its borders that it could prevent birds from crossing over, but yet had done little to prevent foreign fighters from leaving Syria for Iraq. Zebari said he had reinforced Amb. Khalilzad,s points on Syria with Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa.

16. (S) Talabani said that upon his return to the region, he would "frighten" the Syrians by telling them that they were now "in trouble" because the USG might opt for regime change. He added half-jokingly that he would also warn the SARG of possible Sunni Arab moves to challenge Alawite dominance in Syria. Welch appealed to the Iraqis to continue taking a tough public line on Syria -- especially on September 19 and 20, when the ministerial meeting on Lebanon would highlight Syria,s negative role elsewhere in the region. Zebari promised to oblige.

17. (C) Foreign Minister Zebari noted that the Syrians had claimed that Syrian President Bashar al-Asad was not coming to the UNGA because the USG had refused his visa. Welch clarified that al-Asad chose not to attend UNGA not because of a visa issue but because he thought he would be embarrassed by Syria,s diplomatic isolation. Syria then belatedly decided to send Foreign Minister Shara,a to the UNGA, Welch noted.

IRAN

18. (C) Despite his meeting Iranian President Ahmadinejad at UNGA, Talabani said that he felt like he still did not know the new Iranian leader. Zebari recalled that when he accompanied Iraqi Prime Minister Ja,afari to Tehran, Ahmadinejad appeared to be a true "son of the revolution" who reported directly to Ayatollah Khomeini. Zebari said Ja,afari had argued with Ahmadinejad in Tehran that the cause of violence in Iraq was not foreign occupation but rather Ba'athist and extremist ideology. The new Iranian Foreign Minister, Zebari added, was an "ideological Muslim" who had been expelled from Turkey when he was Iran,s Ambassador there because he had fomented unrest among Turkish Islamists.

19. (S) Talabani predicted that Iran would continue to make life difficult for the USG and ITG by "looking for the bomb" while holding out the possibility that Iran could undermine stability in Iraq. Talabani averred that Iran had a secret agreement with Syria to work together in Iraq. As evidence, the Iraqi President pointed to a conference of Iraqi insurgents in Beirut that had been guarded by Hizballah -- which he said could not have occurred without Iran,s knowledge and support. Talabani added that after Iran,s recent elections, the situation in Iran had become increasingly unstable. Iranian Kurds were "boiling," Iranian Arabs were very upset, the Turcomen and Baluchis were agitated, and the opposition was growing in strength.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITICAL PROCESS

10. (S) Talabani said the USG and the Kurds should

"coordinate on all levels for the (December) election" and appealed directly for USG financial support for moderate parties. He suggested that the Kurds could arrange joint lists with moderate Arabs to help them win seats, but that neither the Kurds nor moderate Arabs could afford to let the Islamists win the December ballot. Welch urged Talabani and KRG President Masud Barzani (the head of Zebari,s political party) to honor their promises to the USG to ensure Sunni Arab participation in Iraq,s political process. Talabani, who claimed to speak for Barzani as well, pledged that the Kurds would do their best to ensure inclusiveness.

¶12. (S) Asked about reports that PM Ja,afari and former PM Allawi were against the draft constitution, Talabani predicted that neither would come out against the text. Despite what he acknowledged as deep antipathy for Ja,afari ("I hate him"), Talabani assessed that the PM would not cross the USG. He suggested Barzani could influence Allawi, but also advised the USG to urge Allawi as soon as possible to support the constitution.

RICE